

Speech      Report to the Board of Regents on SACS Accreditation  
Notes:      For this report, the Board of Regents wants "just the facts." I have spoken to Andrew and Dan about this and Andrew wanted me to stress to you that he does not feel this is an opportunity to hint at our needs for more money, but rather our answer to a request from the board. He has seen other presidents make this presentation and they were well received for being short and factual.

The speech will be given to the Education Committee of the Board of Regents. The chairman of the Committee is William Clark. Other members of the committee are Suzanne Elson, vice chair; Charles H. Jones; Tom Coleman; Elsie P. Hand; John Howard Clark; Elridge W. McMillan; and Edgar L. Rhodes.

Chairman Clark and members of the committee, it is a pleasure to speak to you this morning. Per your request, I am here to fill you in on the report filed by the Reaffirmation Committee from the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The report was written using information derived from a site visit and a self-study compliance audit prepared by the Georgia Tech administration. On a small sidenote, the Georgia Tech self-study was done differently than most university self-studies; we used the alternative model currently under development by the Commission of Colleges that is being pilot tested by a limited number of institutions through 1997. The main difference between the alternative study and the traditional self-study is that the alternative study is less comprehensive, concentrating instead upon key strategic issues deemed vital to the future of the Institute.

The committee visited last May—before I arrived at Tech, so I'd like to let you know right now that I disclaim all responsibility for any weaknesses found, but am happy to take full credit for all strengths uncovered.

During their visit, to no one's surprise, the committee found that we were (and I quote here) "In compliance with all conditions of eligibility." Also no surprise for this technological university known in certain circles for our preponderance of people wearing pocket protectors—was their finding that our self-study was (and I'm quoting again) "thorough, analytical, and provided for appropriate follow-up."

They also noted that as a result of the self-study we were taking steps to correct weaknesses and were doing a good job of strategic planning.

We received high points on our adherence to our mission, institutional effectiveness, educational programs, and commitment to improvement. I'll quote again from the report: "Georgia Tech is addressing the curriculum and teaching/learning functions, research, and public service dimensions of its mission in a responsible, substantive, and often noteworthy manner."

Specifically praised was (please hold up your fingers here to differentiate between groups)

- our mission itself;
- the establishment of our Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning—showing our dedication and commitment to the importance of teaching; and
- the improvement of our educational support system— shown through the continued increase in the graduation rate of undergraduate and graduate students.

We've certainly come a long way since my student days at Tech when only one out of three students was expected to graduate.

This ends the “good news” portion of my speech because as to be expected, the Committee did make several recommendations. We did not, however, take these recommendations as bad news because most were in accordance with self-identified Institute goals for improvement and were simply confirmation of areas we know need work. Most of the SACS Committee's findings also corresponded with similar accreditation studies conducted by other accreditation units, specifically the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, the National Architecture Accrediting Board, the Planning Accreditation Board, and the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology.

The SACS Committee made five recommendations and six suggestions in all. Georgia Tech has responded to each and I'd like to quickly go over those recommendations and suggestions— along with our responses with you.

Recommendation 1. Library space should be renovated, and additional space should be made available for a high-density storage system. The committee also commented that the Price Gilbert Memorial Library does not meet the current needs of the Institute's programs.

This recommendation is one we have heard often—from students, faculty, and staff and the following actions have been initiated:

- Using internal funds and MRR funds, a subbasement of the library will be renovated and made available for storage.
- To utilize funds from the Chancellor's office to link our library with the rest of the state as part of his statewide library project.

It is our goal to expand the library in the future to better meet the needs of faculty, staff, and students, and have asked for funds to be allocated for this in the 1999 capital budget and the 2000 capital budget. We will also seek funds from the upcoming capital campaign to be used for library enhancement.

Recommendation 2—also concerns the Library. Support for library collections should be expanded.

During the past two years, we used \$500,000 in nonstate funds to expand the Library's holdings. Pending availability of funds, we intend to continue this practice. On an encouraging note, several of our past classes have committed to fundraising for the Library as part of their reunion giving, as have various student groups. We will also use \$700,000 from the University System of Georgia in FY 96 to expand library holdings and improve information technology.

Recommendation 3. Action should be taken to "correct internal control weaknesses and develop procedures to assess and ensure the effectiveness of existing internal controls."

In response to this problem, we have hired a new senior vice president for administration and finance, Mr. Robert Thompson, to assess and help alleviate these weaknesses. Bob

is a former colleague of mine from the University of Washington and I have full confidence in his abilities to transform these weaknesses into iron-clad strengths.

Recommendation 4. A “proactive approach” should be taken to require the “timely resolution of all future audit findings by appropriate administrative and managerial personnel.”

Both Mr. Thompson and myself have taken personal responsibility to ensure this is done.

Recommendation 5. A review should be undertaken of “the allocation process and the potential sources of internal and external funding to ensure definitive action is taken to increase the allocations for recurring annual funding to address the serious problems of deferred maintenance and deferred modernization.”

This is a hard one. We currently have a \$38 million maintenance backlog which grows each year. Preliminary assessments for new improvements are in the hundreds of millions of dollars. We have taken steps to undertake a comprehensive facilities needs assessment and hope to use funds from our upcoming capital campaign to help fund this area as well.

Those were the Committee’s recommendations. I’ll now move on to the suggestions.

Suggestion 1. Additional library staff are needed.

This is an easy one. We have been funded for new staff and

will add additional staff during FY 96.

Suggestion 2. Student financial aid should “provide an effective program that is in compliance with standard auditing procedures.”

We have hired a new director who had already begun to correct past problems. We have also hired a new associate director, three new counselors, and two new accountants. Improved financial aid systems and processes are also in place and quarterly reviews have been initiated.

Suggestion 3. The position of senior vice president for administration and finance should be filled with “an individual who possesses ‘human relation skills, technical knowledge, and experience in financial affairs.’

Robert Thompson is all that and more.

Suggestion 4—The senior vice president for administration and finance should “review the existing organizational structure of and positions within the administration and finance area and make any changes necessary to achieve the most effective and efficient organization possible.”

I am pleased to say that Mr. Thompson has already begun this process. As part of this process, we have retained KPMG Peat-Marwick to undertake a study of the Institute’s organizational structure and administrative and financial processes to determine how we need to structurally modify ourselves to better address issues that have plagued us in the past.

Suggestion 5. Georgia Tech should provide “professional development and technical training for all employees with supervisory responsibilities.”

I am pleased to report that due to funding from an interested alumnus, we were able to initiate Supertrain, a supervisory training program, in the fall of 1994.

And the last Suggestion. Suggestion 6. Georgia Tech should “strengthen coordination of space allocation to improve effective space utilization and ensure accurate information for indirect cost determination.”

This will be undertaken as part of the comprehensive facilities needs assessment and organization/administrative process review.

All in all, pretty painless. As I said earlier, I agree with all of their recommendations and suggestions. However, in some cases, it will be a means of finding the necessary funds before we can attack a certain concern. Specifically, some of our maintenance concerns come to mind.

But, as we begin to move shore up our weaknesses, we will do so invoking the maxim by John Wooten that has become a particular favorite of mine that says: “Do not let what you cannot do, interfere with what you can do.”

Thank you very much for your time this morning.